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Screws tighten in spy wars

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AND SO THE two-month-old temper tantrum in Soviet-American relations has ended with the White House boasting that it has "decapitated" Soviet intelligence operations in this country—and silently facing, in return, a crippled capacity to monitor events in the Soviet Union.

Who comes off worse? The White House is proclaiming victory. The State Department, through a stiff upper lip, knows that the U.S. has been kicked in the teeth.

Moscow's response to the U.S. expulsion of 55 Soviet diplomats Tuesday was diabolically simple. Wednesday, the Russians expelled only five more Americans—but withdrew the 200 Soviet employees who worked for the U.S. Embassy in Moscow: The men and women who chauffeured and serviced the embassy's cars, repaired its air conditioners, made the boiler run in the winter, translated the newspapers and served *djin s tonikom* (gin and tonic) at the embassy's receptions.

Henceforth, both sides will have equal numbers of diplomats in each other's capitals—a maximum of 225 including security personnel. It is a false equality. Soviet diplomats in the U.S. don't have to spend all day in line to buy a cucumber or a train ticket or a light bulb. Until yesterday, American diplomats in Moscow didn't either. Locally hired Russians did all those dirty, frustrating chores for them. Now the Russians are gone—apparently for good.

If the Americans don't want to waste their own days and talents on the drudgery of mere survival in the world's first worker and peasant state, they will have to bring in American service personnel to assist them—and every carpenter or electrician or cook we send to Moscow means one less professional diplomat we can station there. The limit of 225 must be met.

Yes, the American ambassador to Moscow can make his own bed. And yes, his wife can spend her days going down to the collective farm market—as U.S. embassy wives used to do—with a picture of a cow, and by gesture persuade some farmer to hack a roast out of the beef carcass hanging there.

But who is going to do the donkey work of scanning and translating those endlessly dull Soviet newspapers? Who will operate the telephone switchboard and repair the falling plaster? Who will fry the hamburgers for the Marine guards in the snack bar? All, henceforth, must be Americans, and all will count against the 225-person limit on professional diplomats.

The Russians have a peculiar genius for making people punish themselves. The U.S. has no choice but to expel its own diplomats from Moscow and replace them with chambermaids, automobile mechanics and plumbers.

"We expect that there will have to be some fairly substantial changes in our staffing patterns, as we need personnel to take up the task previously performed by others," State Department

spokesman Charles Redman said bravely yesterday. "Without question there will be some change in our ability to monitor what happens in the Soviet Union. We are prepared to cope with it."

The hollow U.S. threat is that "equal and reciprocal restrictions will apply to the activities of the Soviet Embassy (in Washington) and the consulate general (in San Francisco)." But the Russians don't employ 200 Americans to make their embassy run. They have maybe 10.

The reality is, according to a senior U.S. official, "We're going to have a substantial paring down of our professional staff in Moscow to permit a minimum subsistence and repair crew to come in and keep things running."

The paradox in this two-month-long, tit-for-tat exchange, which began with the arrest of Soviet UN employee Gennadi Zakharov in Queens Aug. 23, is that the end result is absolute equality in diplomatic numbers—and absolute equality in numbers gives the Russians absolutely more slots for real diplomats and real spies in Washington than we will be allowed to have in Moscow.